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Rep. Abzug Plans Own Domestic Spy Hearings

Newhouse News Service

The ambitious new chairwoman of a House Government Operations subcommittee is threatening to upstage the special committee the House created to investigate the CIA and other U.S. intelligence agencies.

Declaring the issue within her jurisdiction, Rep. Bella Abzug (D-N.Y.)—elevated by seniority this year to head the Subcommittee on Government Information and Individual Rights—is planning her own hearings into charges that the CIA and the Secret Service have been spying illegally on American citizens.

Only by arranging for her to go abruptly to Vietnam yesterday as part of a special fact-finding congressional delegation was the House leadership able to divert Mrs. Abzug from starting her own public hearings Thursday.

Mrs. Abzug had arranged to take testimony in public sessions from her first two witnesses: CIA Director William E. Colby and David McDonald, the assistant secretary of the treasury for enforcement, who supervises the Secret Service.

Both men had accepted her invitation to appear before her subcommittee Thursday. The hearings would have given Mrs. Abzug—who recently announced that she would seek the Senate seat held by James L. Buckley (Cons.-R-N.Y.) next year—a long head start on the 10-member Select Committee on Intelligence just created by the House.

But at 11 a.m. Monday, Mrs. Abzug was called out of a Rayburn House Office Building by a State Department messenger who hurriedly administered an oath and took her signature for a freshly issued diplomatic passport. At noon, Speaker Carl Albert announced a list of House members, including Mrs. Abzug, who would be leaving for Vietnam at 8 a.m. the following morning.

This caused Mrs. Abzug to postpone her hearings, but William Phillips, staff counsel to her subcommittee, said they probably will be rescheduled for the second week in March.